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Randall Denley: Ontarians' reaction to competing climate change plans may decide the next federal election

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Body

Ontarians have a big environmental and political decision to make in 2019. It is one that will go a long way toward determining the outcome of the fall federal election.

They have been offered two competing approaches to combat climate change. The provincial government's plan will regulate emissions and offer incentives to reduce them. Expect a remarkably similar approach from the federal Conservatives. The Trudeau government, however, insists a carbon tax is essential.

So far, this has largely played out as a battle between Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Premier Doug Ford, but Trudeau is the guy with all the political jeopardy. If Trudeau imposes his carbon tax it will let Ford rail against the Liberals for as long as they are in power. If Trudeau can't persuade Ontarians that a carbon tax is reasonable, he is going to lose a lot of seats in the province and possibly the election.

For that reason, the onus is on Trudeau to justify his plan to a province where nearly half the population remains sceptical, even after he promised that most people would get back more money than the carbon tax will cost them.

To persuade Ontarians, Trudeau needs to do a much better job of answering several key questions.

Why does he insist that pollution is free? Carbon dioxide is the major greenhouse gas, but it is neither pollution nor free. CO₂ is a colourless, odourless gas formed by respiration, combustion and organic decomposition. It is an essential element of plant and human life. The issue is that too much of it is being produced, contributing to increased temperatures. Burning fossil fuels is far from free. In Ontario, there is already just over 20 cents in direct taxes on a litre of gas, and the cost of the gas and the taxes are subject to HST. In all, Ontarians pay more than 30 cents a litre in taxes for their "pollution."

Industries in Chemical Valley are shown in this view of Sarnia Bay on Thursday June 6, 2017 in Sarnia, Ont.

If a tax of 30 cents a litre hasn't encouraged Ontarians to sharply reduce automobile use, why will Trudeau's carbon tax make a difference? The Trudeau carbon tax will start at 4.5 cents a litre and increase to 11 cents over five years. Ontarians can buy gasoline now for \$1 a litre. Will they buy less at 104.5 cents a litre? Economists like to talk about prices encouraging people to change their behaviour, but Trudeau's puny carbon tax seems unlikely to do that.

Why is Trudeau telling us his plan will meet Canada's Paris agreement emissions targets by 2030? His own environment bureaucrats said last week that the federal plan will miss the Paris target without unspecified new measures. Projections say Canada would need a carbon tax of \$200 per tonne of emissions to meet those targets. Trudeau's tax only goes to \$50 a tonne by 2022. It seems like the tax will have to rise dramatically, or it will fail.

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How much of Trudeau's anticipated CO2 reduction will be directly attributable to the tax? One could easily form the impression that the carbon price is the plan, but Simon Fraser University **climate** scientist Mark Jaccard's analysis says the carbon tax contributes only 15 per cent. An environment ministry spokesperson says pricing carbon will reduce emissions by 50 to 60 megatonnes by 2022. That's no more than 20 per cent of planned reductions.

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<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/randall-denley-ontarios-politicians-need-to-focus-on-spending-cuts-not-squabbles>)

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<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/randall-denley-with-pragmatic-new-climate-change-plan-ontario-offers-antidote-to-eco-hysteria>)

Why is the Ontario plan unacceptable? The federal government immediately dismissed it because it did not include a carbon tax, but like the federal plan, it does include industry emissions regulations, clean fuel emissions reductions and electric car expansion. Ontario is increasing its transit supply. If the Ontario plan is really so different, could Trudeau explain to us how?

Why does Ontario have to carry more than its share of the emissions reduction burden? The Ontario government points out that it is already more than two-thirds of the way to reducing its emissions by 30 per cent compared to 2005 levels. That's the national target as well. Most of that reduction was due to closing coal-fired power plants, not "putting a price on pollution." It seems reasonable for Ontario to do its share, but Trudeau insists that Ontario must do more than that.

Trudeau says the carbon tax is not a money grab because all the money collected will be redistributed to residents and businesses, although not in proportion to what they paid. Okay, but why is he charging HST on the carbon tax? That's not coming back to people paying the carbon tax.

Justin Trudeau's favourite form of persuasion is portraying opponents of his carbon tax as uninformed, and possibly **climate** change deniers. His environment minister, Catherine McKenna, is a one-note prophet of **doom**. And yet there are many legitimate questions Trudeau has not answered. If he wants votes in Ontario, he'd better get to it.

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